

Harold Weisberg

Meachum: He's worse

Those of us who seek to inform others bear a special responsibility — to *inform*. Only an informed electorate can make representative society work as those truly great leaders and political thinkers who created our form of government intended for it to work. This does not require perfection for perfection is neither human nor possible. It does require honesty and scrupulous adherence to fact and it requires that we state our prejudices in either the expression of opinion or representation of fact.

My own reporting experience, first print and last electronic, may well have begun before Roy Meachum's. It began in the late 1920s and within a few years some of my writing was syndicated. My last daily reporting was of Harry Truman's election and it did include the successful Jewish effort to establish the state of Israel against the attacking armies of much greater numbers and more abundant equipment of the entire Arab world. For more than two decades, based on prior experiences that include Senate investigator and editor, investigative reporter and wartime intelligence analyst, my writing has been about the assassinations of President Kennedy and Dr. King. These are controversial subjects. I have received at least 15,000 letters from strangers and from those about whom I have written. Not one person has written to complain of factual error or that I treated him unfairly. I say this not to boast but to indicate that on even the most controversial subjects, those that arouse passions, it is possible to be both accurate and fair. The prerequisite is not a lack of feeling but the intent to be accurate and fair. One can be and still be a partisan.

Those of Roy Meachum's columns that I have criticized have been neither accurate nor fair and, as recently as his "The Cry of anti-Semitism: Hogwash!" column, all the evidence is that he does not intend to be. One of the common faults in all these columns is that he misrepresents. This one, too, is at best a shallow mishmash.

And it is, from headline to conclusion, classic anti-Semitism, what the headline and text prate does not exist.

It also is anti-Israeli, which is not the same as anti-Semitism.

Most of the column is devoted to the flap over Cardinal O'Connor's recent trip to the Middle East, including Israel, but that is merely a vehicle for Meachum's biases. It is self-important and patronizing, as in, "I personally doubt that American Jewish leaders tried to set

up the cardinal," Meachum's own straw man which still suggests that Jews did set the cardinal up. It is ignorant in stating that "the Vatican decided to exculpate Jews in the death (sic) of Jesus." Obviously, no living person could be responsible for that crucifixion and equally obviously, Pontius Pilate, the Roman ruler, ordered it. The most the Vatican could say is that Christ was not killed by a Jew. Only secret or overt anti-Semites have held otherwise. But even Meachum's formulation can be interpreted as the classic anti-Semitism — that Jews, living, dead and yet unborn, are the "Christ-killers." I do not take time for the other dubious content of this portion of his mishmash.

His opening sentence gives credibility to a White House fabrication to protect Reagan, one already exposed for what it is, that Israel "set up" the disgraceful, wimpish, flimflamed swap of weapons to Iran for the return of American hostages. From this Meachum attempts to justify himself and condemn letters to the editor criticizing him — which are mostly mine — and to defend himself against his criticism. He says, "We hear the familiar cry of 'anti-Semitism' — raised every time criticism appears of Israel. It appeared in *Letters to the Editor*..."

I did not equate his anti-Semitism with his anti-Israeli writings. I was in each instance quite specific, never resorting to the dishonest kind of generality I quote above. I was no less specific in illustrating his pro-Arab propaganda and his factual inaccuracies. Neither then nor now has been specific in any pretended defense of his writing. He did defend Abu Nidal, one of the major Arab terrorists, and his subordinates over their piracy and cold-blooded murder when they hijacked the *Achille Lauro* and murdered an aged and crippled American who also happened to be a Jew. They are, to Meachum and in such barbarities, real "freedom fighters." In trying to apprehend Nidal when it captured the others, our government was wrong, according to Meachum. This, no doubt, comes from his vast knowledge of the laws of piracy.

Then there was his writing that Jews were killing innocent Arab babies, writing that omitted the exact opposite, that Arabs bombarded the schools and homes of Jewish children (and women and old people), terrorist and not military shellings. Meachum also did not recall all those bombings of buses and other vehicles, including airplanes, or the slaughters at airports, all of innocents. Only that Jews (who he

than 'hogwash'

neglected to mention were defending themselves) killed Arab babies.

And who, according to Meachum, is responsible for the fact that there is no peace in the Middle East? Only *American Jews*. (That after the combined Arab armies attacked the Israelis and were defeated; that Israelis had established and much of the world had recognized the state of Israel; and that not one of the Arab powers would sign a peace treaty or recognize its existence — which is *directly* responsible for the present situation there — Meachum has not seen fit to mention.)

So, Meachum now does not respond to any of *specific* criticisms of his writing for he cannot. Instead, he launches into another generality — one, it happens, that is a classic formulation of 2000 years of anti-Semitism. It also is the classic complaint about other immigrants and minorities by those to whom Emma Goldman's words engraved on the Statue of Liberty mean nothing — they and they alone are responsible for all persecutions of themselves.

Meachum, not uncommonly, is ambiguous. He does not say whether he means that my criticisms of him for his anti-Semitic writings or the existence of anti-Semitism itself is "hogwash." From the internal evidence of this column I think he means both. After what I quote from him above about *Letters to the Editor*, which is where he cries "Hogwash!" he says:

"Where anti-Semitism increases in this country, American Jews must look to themselves and their actions, as individuals and through their organizations."

I criticize him for anti-Semitic writing and *I* cause anti-Semitism? The Anti-Defamation League exposes anti-Semites and *that* causes anti-Semitism? In this Meachum says exactly what Hitler said, what the Tsar's police said when they fabricated the famous anti-Semitic tract generally referred to as the Protocols of Zion.

As usual in his flauntings of ignorance and prejudice, if not hatred, Meachum is arrogant, ordaining that what is is not and that what is not is; he looks down on mere mortals, and in this remarkable, if unintended, self-portrait, after saying that, as quoted above, Jews are responsible for anti-Semitism, he has an incredible clause, referring to non-Israeli Jews as "those who choose to live in other nations, including the United States." American Jews are not *American*? Why should *any* American have to "choose" between living here or anywhere else?

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And do any Americans have to live anywhere else to have and express opinions on events in those parts of the world? Would he dare say this about blacks and South Africa? About Chinese Americans and China? Russian Americans and the Soviet Union? (His entire sentence suggests that American Jews think they govern Israel, another Meachum evil.)

Meachum really means that there is no anti-Semitism. His reason is that "laws and the media's watchdogs prevent its existence as official or corporate policy." Laws cannot prevent prejudice and hatred or indulgence of them any more than "the media's watchdogs" can; and, omniscient as Meachum would have us blighted and ignorant yokels believe he is, can he really know the policies of all corporations, to say nothing of their practices? Where has he been living all these years, other than in his dream-world presentation of himself in his columns?

The first amendment gives us all precious rights but these rights do not include, as the Supreme Court held, shouting "fire!" in a crowded theater. Meachum's column pretending that "the cry of anti-Semitism" is mere "hogwash" is traditional anti-Semitism and typifies his incitations to hatred that has victimized Jews for 2,000 years. One at a time such small-time evils do not do the harm of starting a riot in a theater but over the years they have accumulated into the most horrible genocide history records. In this stretching of the first amendment Meachum does, I think appropriately, align himself alongside Hitler who also claimed that the Jews are responsible for anti-Semitism. This was not an accidental slip — Meachum said it twice. He puts himself where he is, not I. I regret that his column says he belongs there.

Harold Weisberg is a Frederick writer who has written frequently about Roy Meachum.

James Alexander

No logic, no subtlety

Pity us poor journalists," they cry! "Scorned, suspected and mistrusted by a public for whom we seek only the truth." Well, three cheers for the public when faced with such noble truth seekers as your illustrious columnist, Roy Meachum.

During the summer, in an essay as bizarre and fascinating as a candied Tarantula, Meachum attacked the once and evidently future mayor of Frederick. This oddity, a paean of self-justification, aggrandizement and bathos, was totally incomprehensible with respect to its presumed point: the inferred but unstipulated heinous crimes perpetrated by His Honor on a gullible public.

Now as a post-Yuletide gift to both his loyal readers, Meachum launches his pernicious analogy of Maryland's governor to that late and unlamented savage, Benito Mussolini! William Donald Schaefer is a

professional politician and, as such, no doubt subject to the myriad and woeful shortcomings of his detestable calling. But this is the U.S. of A., 1987; not the Fascist Italy of 1937. The governor is elected! He did not intimidate, bully and murder his way to office!

This strained, humorless, vile comparison is, no doubt, quite justifiably considered slander by its target. More viciously, however, it is a gratuitous and condescending insult to the Maryland electorate.

If odious analogies must be made, a far more apt one would be Meachum to Dr. Goebbels, the master of Nazi deceit and propaganda. The latter, however, was capable of subtlety and apparent logic. Two attributes which never see the light of day in any of Meachum's ponderous and hastily-scribbled invective.

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